Teaching and Learning Languages with a Native Speaker Assistant

A Teacher’s Guide

Robyn Moloney
Teaching and Learning Languages with a Native Speaker Assistant: A Teacher’s Guide is a welcome new resource. One of the most enriching experiences for language learners is to have the opportunity to engage in an authentic dialogue with a native speaker as it allows them to have a first-hand encounter with the verbal and non-verbal features of the language and to come in contact with people who view the world differently.

While schools around the world regularly benefit from the contribution of native speaker assistants, it seems that such programs are even more significant in Australia, a nation which is physically very remote from other countries. The testimonies interspersed throughout this guide indicate how grateful students are to be warranted such opportunities.

This Teacher’s Guide, built on the findings of research in Australian schools, offers a useful template of best practice. It encompasses various practical aspects of engaging a native speaker assistant and suggestions for creative practice. Its goal is to revitalise the practice and to bring it into line with contemporary language pedagogy. It challenges teachers to consider how the experience can be an important catalyst in their students’ as well as their own linguistic and intercultural growth.

I am pleased to commend this resource as a contribution to quality teaching and learning of languages.

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Associate Dean (Global Engagement)
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities
Being an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures means being a person who knows, uses and teaches language and culture in an ethical and reflective way.

...It includes teaching learners to value, respect and engage with languages and cultures in their own lives and to interact with others across linguistic and cultural borders.

It means creating a culture of learning which approaches language, culture and learning with respect, empathy, commitment enthusiasm and personal responsibility.

Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association (AFMLTA), 2005

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Introduction

Congratulations for considering the inclusion of a Native Speaker Assistant in your language program. With your Assistant, you have the potential to enhance greatly your students’ achievement and pleasure in their language learning, and you have the potential to extend your own professional development as an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures. Whether you have taught with an Assistant for several years, or are just setting out, the suggestions in this Guide will equip you to achieve best practice teaching and learning through your inclusion of the Assistant.

The practical guidelines and suggestions have been developed from a research study of practice in a number of NSW schools, and also include suggestions from practice in the European, UK and US contexts.

The inclusion of an Assistant is not a new practice, but it plays a new role today in facilitating intercultural language learning in students and teachers. Revisiting the practice of Assistant inclusion is an opportunity to examine our own relationship with language and culture.

The Guide includes some of the important professional development questions posed by the Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of Languages and Cultures (AFMLTA, 2005). Teachers can take the opportunity to review their practice and the language outcomes of their students, and to use the Guide as an opportunity for professional reflection. The searching questions of the Standards show that we can use our Assistant interaction as a learning opportunity to extend our own skills in language and to explore intercultural learning.

This Guide covers recruitment, training and activities within and beyond the classroom. Teachers are asked to consider the Assistant’s role in bringing fresh ideas to lesson planning, creating resources, and in maintaining the teacher’s language skills.

Most important of all, effective language learning can only be achieved when there is a good working relationship between the Assistant and the teacher, the language department staff and the school. Any model of good practice will depend on a school’s context, culture, and curriculum. A selection of sample resources and online links are provided in a number of appendices.

“He’s sort of like a connection with France, and he represents why I want to learn French. We want to be able to speak to people like him.”

(Year 11 student)
1. Choosing an Assistant

**WHO IS A NATIVE SPEAKER ASSISTANT?**

A Native Speaker Assistant is defined most commonly as a member of staff, additional to the regular language teacher(s), who is employed by the school to provide supplementary support to language learning in the school. He/ she is typically a part-time employee, but may be employed by the school on either a short term or longer term basis. Assistants may be employed through working-holiday agencies, from the school parent body, personal contacts or from the wider community. They may be from a wide diversity of educational and employment backgrounds.

*How do you use and develop your language abilities?*

*What sorts of contacts do you have with target language communities, personally or though reading, the media or the web / internet?*

(AFMLTA, 2005)

**WHY INCLUDE A NATIVE SPEAKER ASSISTANT IN YOUR CLASSROOM?**

Teachers have indicated that there are two aspects to their rationale for inclusion of an Assistant in their language program: enrichment of their students’ learning of language and culture, and support for their own teaching.
The first rationale for including an Assistant is generally the provision of an authentic speaking model, and the opportunity to create a “need-to-speak” context for spoken interaction. The language teacher, however highly qualified and passionate about the language, may lack the authenticity of the native speaker. In students’ perception, speaking practice with a non-native can be seen as an artificial exercise.

A real-life natural conversation is a one-to-one exchange of ideas to relate experiences, information, needs, and express opinions. Students are keen to include in conversation genuine details from their own lives, words or phrases outside the standard vocabulary. Language learning with the Assistant allows an authentic conversation to take place with an individual student, with relevant content and idiom, as a genuine exchange of personal information.

The Assistant is a valuable model for both students and teachers, of accurate pronunciation, grammar, idiom, and contemporary context usage.

Culture includes the language, customs, values, relationships and behaviours of a society. Teachers and students today, as part of their linguistic competence, need a deeper understanding of life in the target country. They need to be able to explain the invisible cultural values and etiquette which lie hidden in its language.

The Assistant is an individual with first-hand experience of the cultural life of the target language, who is able to bring that knowledge to the students through personal narrative and anecdote in a vivid and personally engaging way. The Assistant represents dynamic culture as it is lived and shared, rather than as fixed, exotic and distant. The sharing of their perceptions of life in Australia and their own country provides numerous opportunities for intercultural enquiry learning in teachers, students and the Assistant.

**How do you express your intercultural awareness in teaching and in daily life?**

(AFMLTA, 2005)
Through structured interaction with the individual Assistant, students can develop awareness of the differences and similarities between the Assistant’s life and their own lives. This critical reflection develops respect for the diverse backgrounds of others and a heightened consciousness of their own cultural heritage. In particular, the Assistant plays a valuable role in rural school communities which have limited opportunity to experience cultural diversity.

Assistants may possess a range of talents, skills, occupations, experiences and backgrounds. Apart from their presence in language classes, their interaction with the whole student body through demonstration of these other abilities can aid in the development of intercultural communication in all students and staff across the school.
TEACHER SUPPORT

The Assistant can support both background and non-background teachers, for example, by suggesting new activities and strategies, creating original resources, modeling new structures, testing students individually, providing practice for examinations, arranging cultural incursions and excursions, showing realia items, and providing supportive strategies to assist the classroom teacher in lessons.

Through the Assistant, teachers can develop a greater understanding and knowledge of the target language society, particularly if teacher travel opportunities are limited. The Assistant can also help to maintain and improve the target language proficiency of the non-native classroom teacher, if the teacher takes the opportunity to practise the target language.

This Guide stresses that the support which an Assistant can provide to a teacher needs to be balanced by significant investment of time and preparation on the part of the teacher in order to achieve good outcomes.

In the event of planning a school trip or other exchange activity, the Assistant can support teachers in facilitating appropriate contact with the country’s government officials, sister schools, travel agencies and locations of interest. The Assistant may also be able to provide contacts to organisations and online sources in the target country to purchase teaching resources.

“Itohk provided our Indonesian class with plenty of help in all areas of study – from Indonesian culture to speaking and pronunciation. He was very helpful. He also taught us new words not in our textbook / updated words.”

(Year 11 student)
Depending on existing resources in schools, teachers will require different kinds of support from a native speaker assistant. Assistants range in personality, age and educational levels, and come from a multitude of linguistic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The Assistant ideally should be a person with substantial personal experience of the language, culture and lifestyle of their own country. He/she should be in regular contact with the country, have an interest in its current social issues and be able to discuss them with students.

The Assistant is typically a young person who has just graduated from university in their own country. With some similar interests, and closer in age to students, younger Assistants are role models who often become popular with students.
Research shows that Assistants are also frequently recruited from mature-age resident native speakers. Schools need to be aware that native speakers who have lived in Australia for many years may be out of touch with contemporary youth culture in the target country, use less current vocabulary and have limited knowledge of the cultural and social changes that have taken place since they left their country. Schools should ensure that Australian resident Assistants have regular contact with the target country, knowledge of current terminology and colloquialisms and an awareness of contemporary matters.

What ideas and values inform your language teaching? Where do these come from? (AFMLTA, 2005)

Though mature-age native speakers may have limitations in modern idiom or teenage conversational language, they may nevertheless have more critical, reflective distance on their culture and more knowledge of the polite and informal language registers. In an ideal situation, the answer to achieving this balance is access to several Assistants, varying in age, gender and occupation, to expose students to a variety of authentic native speakers. In several schools, teachers invite native speaker guests to come to the school on a single occasion to speak with students and offer this diversity.

Schools without an existing community network to recruit new native speaker assistants may like to refer to the website addresses provided in Appendix 1, Searching for an Assistant, as a starting point or by contacting consulates or embassies for information.

In recruiting an Assistant it is important to assess the Assistant’s ability to use standard language, with correct pronunciation and grammar. The potential Assistant’s accent could be assessed by another native speaker, as part of the recruitment process.

Assistants may come from various backgrounds with little knowledge of how to teach a language. This is not necessarily a problem. What is of overall importance is the Assistant’s enthusiasm, passion and patience, in wanting to help learners of the target language.

“I found working with the Assistant very useful. It was good to see how they really speak, and what they do, how they act.” (Year 8 student)
It is debatable whether the Assistant needs to know English well. It is difficult for an Assistant with limited English to make linguistic connections and establish good relationships with students and the wider staff. However, an Assistant’s limited English can be a positive and motivating factor in the student’s need to speak the target language, and in developing students’ coping skills. Students at one school reported their empathy with their French Assistant who, as an English language learner, was never without his French/English dictionary.

It would be useful to ask the native speaker about the methodology they experienced in their own learning of English or other foreign languages. This may suggest the degree of training needed in order for the Assistant to understand and participate in an Australian school context.

Appendix 2, Suggested criteria for recruitment, contains a list of suggested criteria that could be used in advertising for a native speaker Assistant.

The school and language department’s ethos and goals are best outlined during the initial interview together with clear expectations about the role of the Assistant.

Appendix 3, Our Goals, provides a template for this purpose.

Appendix 4, Assistant Profile, can serve to gather basic information about the Assistant’s specific areas of expertise.
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL ASSISTANT

The following represents a list of some of the characteristics to look for in an Assistant to generate positive learning outcomes in students. The ideal Assistant is:

- Patient
- Warm and friendly
- Cooperative
- Interculturally aware
- Gregarious
- Supportive
- A learner
- Responsible
- Outgoing
- A role model for language education
In his / her first days at your school an Assistant may not only have to cope with an unfamiliar environment but with a very different culture as well. Local knowledge should not be assumed, particularly with Assistants who have only recently arrived in Australia. Appendix 5, Integration into the school, provides some checklists to ensure that significant areas of information are not left out in the initial stages of an Assistant’s employment. The use of such check lists ensures that busy language staff members have covered essential aspects of orientation and integration. Other members of the school staff may be called upon to provide information about other aspects of school life. These initiatives will benefit the effective implementation of the Assistant program.

With regards to day-to-day business, members of staff who interact with the Assistant should be aware that school-related discourse (including acronyms) may be incomprehensible to a relatively new Assistant. It is advisable to regularly check that important information has been well understood.

Although the Assistant, in theory, has access to the same information as other staff members, it is helpful to remind him/her about any upcoming special events, such as public holidays, staff morning tea (and the meaning of bring a plate), school photos, Open Day, sports carnival etc. particularly if it affects his/her own timetable.

Informing the Assistant of what is going on in the school will not only help him/her to be more effective, but will convey that he or she is seen as a valued member of the school community.

How do you use your own expertise to support other teachers, especially less experienced teachers?  
(AFMLTA, 2005)
**INTRODUCTION TO YOUR LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

A new Assistant will need training in a number of aspects in order to achieve the goals you have set. Regular monitoring and review of their progress will be beneficial as they develop their skills. It is helpful to assign one particular language teacher as mentor to the Assistant.

**SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM CULTURE**

Initially, the Assistant should observe language classes over several days, followed by gradual progression, with the teacher’s guidance, to full participation. The classes observed should be those of the target language, but may include classes of other languages. In this way, he/she will become familiar with the classroom environment and the kinds of activities and pedagogy used in Australia. He/she can also observe the teachers’ rapport with their students and may also begin to think about ways in which he/she might extend the language learning of the students. Time spent in training and observation of classes should be considered an integral part of the Assistant’s allocation.

The culture of an Australian classroom may be unlike that which the Assistant has experienced

The Assistant will need to respect:

- the school’s ethos, values and expectations
- the classroom practices of the school
- the school’s pedagogical principles or management style
- the level of formality between individuals
- the code of discipline and assessment methods
- the teacher’s authority over the students
- the values and expectations of parents

“When you put it into practice, you can see that these people actually understand what you’re saying, it changes everything, it’s cool.”

(Year 11 student)
The Assistant will need guidance as to how to model the language appropriately and how to treat student responses in the target language. For example:

- avoid using English wherever possible
- praise students for what they can do
- be aware of the range of abilities
- speak using an appropriate speed and register
- be genuine and show interest in what students say.
- allow students’ speech to flow without interruption. Build confidence.
- remedy incorrect pronunciation by reiterating the student’s words using the correct form.

Teachers may want to add to this list of strategies with additional advice.

How do you demonstrate care and concern for students in the context of fostering their linguistic competence?
(AFMLTA, 2005)

THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF TEACHER AND ASSISTANT

The Assistant and the classroom teacher have different roles. Ideally, their abilities, skills and qualities should complement each other’s.

The teacher has overall professional responsibility for the students’ learning achievement and their welfare. The teacher understands the syllabus requirements and how they are to be implemented through the language program.

The Assistant, being free of the teacher’s administrative and pedagogical duties is able to simply focus on engaging students with the target language and culture. His/her role consists mainly of bringing the language to life through authentic usage and inviting students to contrast and compare one culture with the other through a variety of strategies.
In the service of shaping good practice, it is important to avoid some common ineffective and/or inappropriate use of Assistant time.

- The Assistant is not a qualified teacher and should therefore not be required to explicitly teach grammar. He/she may, instead, put the grammar point into practice in conversation or through an authentic text.

- The Assistant is not a substitute for the classroom teacher. Unless he/she is a qualified teacher, the Assistant should not be made responsible for the safety of students. The group withdrawal room should be in the vicinity of the supervising teacher’s classroom for quick and appropriate response in an emergency situation.

- The Assistant should not be expected to manage behavioural difficulties in the withdrawal groups but should seek the help of the supervising teacher. Students who are made to fully understand the benefits of receiving individual attention from an expert in the target language generally respect this privilege.

- The Assistant should not engage socially with students. This applies to electronic forms of social networking unless they are approved by the school.

- The Assistant is not a regular teacher and should not need detailed knowledge of the syllabus. It should be sufficient for the Assistant to work through the lesson plans with the supervising teacher.

- The Assistant is not a dictionary. His/her role is not to translate texts but to help students understand the meaning of texts through a variety of strategies.

- The Assistant is not a teacher’s aide. Clerical tasks should be related to their teaching. It is important for the supervising teacher to consider how to best use the out-of-class time of the Assistant.

- The Assistant is not a mind-reader. It is important that the supervising teacher provides adequate notice for what they will expect the Assistant to do in the next lesson(s). It is unrealistic to assume that the Assistant will be effective simply because they are familiar with the target language and culture. Refer to the Lesson Planning section of this Guide for further details.
3. Teaching and Learning with the Assistant

PREPARING FOR THE ASSISTANT

Prior to the first encounter in the classroom, the students should be informed that an Assistant, a native speaker of the target language, will actively take part in some of their language lessons. A brainstorming exercise focusing on how a native speaker might benefit their learning may lead students to see the potential value of this extra dimension to their study of the target language and culture.

The teacher may also stress that interaction with the Assistant is a privilege that carries a degree of self-discipline and responsibility. Time spent with the Assistant should be purposeful, significant and productive.

The school may choose to use the opportunity to build the profile of the language faculty by notifying parents of the addition to the program, via the school’s newsletter. A local newspaper may be interested in profiling the extension of the school’s language learning program and welcoming the Assistant to the school community. This exposure may generate more interest about languages from parents and community members.

*How do you encourage learners to see the world from other cultural perspectives?*

(AFMLTA, 2005)
Decisions about which classes will benefit from the Assistant’s participation can be value-laden and often reflect the philosophy of the school. Should there be a balance of his/her time allocation between junior and final year students? Should the Assistant be required to teach alongside the teacher or work alone with small groups or individual students? If the latter is the case, what should the rest of the class be doing in the meantime so that no group of students is disadvantaged through the new arrangements?

**Teachers need to ensure the Assistant’s schedule provides a balance of junior and senior classes.**

Both junior and senior classes benefit from lessons with the Assistant. Positive interactions with the Assistant can motivate them, transform their perceptions, provide an opportunity for real communication, awaken in them a love of language learning and perhaps influence them in their choice of career. Including a short student survey as part of your Unit of Work evaluation may reveal the impact and effectiveness of activities with the Assistant. Gauging student perceptions in this way will inform future programming.

In some secondary schools, it is common practice to employ an Assistant for intensive preparation for the oral examination of final year students. This has generally proved to be very beneficial as Senior speaking skills sessions tend to build language confidence and provide the opportunity to construct sophisticated ideas and opinions within the scope of the examination requirements.
LESSON PLANNING

It is expected that the activities undertaken by the Assistant will have been embedded in the language program to meet syllabus outcomes. It is also expected that these activities may be modified according to the Assistant’s areas of expertise and students’ interests.

**Careful planning is essential if maximum benefit of the Assistant is to be achieved.**

Regular meetings to plan lessons should be incorporated into the Assistant’s schedule.

Such meetings offer an opportunity for both teacher and Assistant to exchange ideas, clarify perceptions about teaching, evaluate past lessons, and assess how the Assistant’s special areas of interest may be incorporated into the program.

These meetings could include the following:

1. Goals of the lesson: what do you want students to achieve?
2. Specific details: topic, language structures, vocabulary and opportunities for intercultural development
3. Suggestions for Assistant-led activities
4. Progression of the lesson
5. Resources to be used

*Appendix 6, Lesson Plan,* may be used during the meeting to record the structure and activities of the lesson and identify the respective responsibilities of both the teacher and the Assistant. The lesson evaluation section can be completed at the end of the lesson by both parties for review at the next meeting.
LESSON COMPONENTS

This section features tasks which can be routinely performed by the Assistant to complement and consolidate classroom work. These tasks should form an integral part of the language lesson as they are effective in placing students in authentic contexts for using the language. The list below is by no means exhaustive and teachers and Assistants are encouraged to add further relevant tasks to it.

At the beginning of the lesson, the Assistant uses the target language to:

- greet the students at the door
- call the roll
- establish the day and date
- review past content.

During the lesson, the Assistant uses the target language to:

- give classroom instructions (including technology terms)
- paraphrase certain words and expressions to clarify meaning
- demonstrate the use of certain words and expressions through examples
- model body language specific to the target language
- support individual students as required.

At the end of the lesson, the Assistant uses the target language to:

- give any relevant instructions (e.g. homework)
- follow the established routine for finishing up the lesson.

What range of learning opportunities do you provide so that all students are able to achieve optimum success and recognition for their performance in language and literacy?

(AFMLTA, 2005)
TEAM TEACHING

While the Assistant’s level of participation in the above tasks is fairly straightforward and directed by the teacher, team teaching entails a higher level of collaboration between the two parties. There are a number of advantages in team teaching: it can focus student's attention, develop their motivation and enhance their understanding. Students also view favourably the fact that the Assistant and the teacher communicate with each other in the target language as the lesson proceeds. It reinforces the message that language is a tool that is used to get things done, not just a subject to be studied.

The following is a list of suggested activities that can be developed using the team-teaching approach with technology support wherever possible:

1. The students prepare current topic-related questions with the teacher in order to interview the Assistant (e.g. about his/her background, likes/dislikes, impressions of Australia etc.). As the Assistant responds to each question, the teacher notes the main points in random order on the board. The students try and reconstruct the interview (questions and answers) in written form (e.g. dialogue/comic strip/ photo story) while both the teacher and the Assistant make themselves available for support.

2. The lesson is divided into planned segments which are delivered by the teacher and the Assistant in turns. For example, the Assistant may explain how he/she prepared for his/her trip to Australia, using visual support (application forms, books about Australia in the target language, photos of self in various jobs to save money etc.). The teacher may then bring the students' attention to aspects of the language that were used in the discourse (e.g. past tense) and reinforce these points by providing relevant exercises and activities.

3. The Assistant reads original short texts featuring language concepts being currently studied. The text could present famous people, animals or objects. Students must work out who or what is being spoken about. The teacher assists the students by providing visual or other cues to key information and may help students frame their questions if necessary.

4. The Assistant and the teacher take roles (witness and detective) in a short skit in the target language about a robbery. Students have to establish the identity of the thief according to what they heard.

5. Groups of students rotate as they undertake tasks involving the four macro-skills. The Assistant and the teacher act jointly to ensure that all students are on task, have adequate resources and are working to the best of their ability in an environment that is conducive to learning.

“... with the combined effort of the native speaker assistant and my main teacher in this subject, I have the chance to increase my speaking and writing skills. (Year 8 student)
As their professional relationship builds up, the Assistant and the teacher may develop an intuitive way of working alongside each other in order to achieve optimum learning outcomes for the students.

Note: while mistakes can and will happen, neither the Assistant nor the teacher should attempt to correct the other while in front of the students. Corrections are best left to the debriefing meeting after the lesson.

As part of working as a team, the Assistant can also assist the teacher in the following strategic ways:

• The conduct of individual speaking tests is usually time consuming and difficult to manage during lessons. The Assistant can be asked to assess the students’ progress during individual withdrawal sessions once the teacher has provided instructions and provided marking criteria such as in Appendix 7, Sample feedback grid.

• The Assistant’s notes taken about student participation in withdrawal sessions may provide additional information for formal reports if relevant.

• The Assistant can provide students with specific feedback, identifying errors and suggesting improvements, before the teacher receives the final copy of a task.

• In some schools, teachers like to involve Assistants in collaborative marking of senior students’ work to help assess fluency and appropriate use of the language from the native speaker perspective.
WITHDRAWAL OF SMALL GROUPS

Participation in rotational withdrawal groups increases learning opportunities for all students, offering them an opportunity to express themselves more frequently and openly. Language learners also benefit from receiving individualised attention. Research shows that students develop more confidence orally when the setting in which they work is less formal. They also tend to talk more openly about their lives and interests in the presence of an Assistant than with a teacher. Proper integration of the Assistant into school life is therefore significant in that it helps nurture positive relationships which, in turn, produce heightened language experiences for the learners.

ORGANISATION

The number of short (approximately 15 minutes) withdrawal group sessions which an Assistant can conduct depends on the length of the lesson and the time it takes for students to move from one classroom to another. Usually, an Assistant can meet at least two groups during one lesson. It is expected that the teacher and the Assistant will have set the change-over time for each group when planning the lesson.

Ideally, withdrawal groups should be made up of no more than four students to encourage full participation from everyone. Through careful planning of activities and positive nurturing by the Assistant, students in small withdrawal groups are able to progress from exchanging simple information to less structured and more interesting communicative exchanges, incorporating known structures and vocabulary.

Students should be made aware that their progress in the withdrawal sessions is monitored and may contribute to their continuous assessment. In order to do this it is recommended that the Assistant be provided with a class roll for annotation. While some schools have developed a formal structure for the assessment of students’ language skills in withdrawal group time, others recognise special effort in speaking with praise and small rewards.

Some measure of accountability needs to be in place in order to attach value to the achievement of learning outcomes in withdrawal group sessions.

The reduced size of the teacher’s class during group withdrawal time is an opportunity for the teacher to:

- consolidate language concepts
- introduce differentiated activities to support students in reaching their full potential
- perform activities that are not possible with the entire class due to the lack of facilities or nature of the task.

Although reduced class size is a special time for both teacher and students, teachers must bear in mind that the introduction of new language concepts may be best kept for core lessons when the whole class is present.

While teachers have the option of providing the Assistant with relevant background information about particular students, it may be more beneficial for the students, if the Assistant develops their own understanding of each student’s ability.

Variations among students due to personality, abilities and learning styles need to be explicitly managed by the Assistant to ensure positive language outcomes for each student. Teachers may need to consider the composition of the groups they allocate to the Assistant and provide explicit strategies for the management of these aspects.
SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

Withdrawal group sessions may be thematically aligned with the topic being currently studied so that students can perceive the relevance of the session content and participate more actively.

Small group interaction needs a motivating hook, to stimulate and engage students. The stimulus for a lively session discussion could consist of visuals, websites, songs, written or spoken texts or cultural artifacts. The Assistant should counter the possible language fatigue that can occur when groups are small by varying the activities.

In order to provide opportunities for success and boost student confidence, progression from familiar to more complex sentence patterns is advised. There should be minimal or no error correction in order to encourage risk-taking with the language.

Activities beyond conversations should be encouraged to extend the learning. Playing a board game, for example, is a good way of reinforcing structures and vocabulary. Learning a physical skill and teaching it to others in the target language (e.g. a dance or Tai Chi movements) also contributes to the strengthening of language skills. Many such ideas should be collected and added to the Assistant’s repertoire. Refer to Appendix 9, Learning activities with the Assistant.

Teachers are advised to equip the Assistant with a variety of strategies such as paraphrasing, use of visual cues (e.g. gestures or charades) to aid comprehension. Although these may require some creative energy, they are important language teaching strategies.

The informal nature of successful student/Assistant relationships in withdrawal group sessions can lead to more incidental exchanges at other times such as lunchtime. Students also appreciate the Assistant’s participation in school activities other than language teaching. Their relationship with the Assistant can contribute to their personal, social and intercultural development.
While it should be combined with other patterns of interaction, a one-on-one conversation with an Assistant is an effective method, for senior students in particular, to polish their ability to communicate in the target language. Students report that, although this kind of setting can be personally confronting and challenging, it is also the most satisfying learning situation. They experience direct interaction and the excitement of being able to engage in an authentic conversation.

One of the advantages of the individual sessions is that the Assistant can adapt the level of language to the particular ability of the learner. To maximise the benefit of individual sessions, given that they may be less frequent than group sessions, both Assistant and students could do a structured preparation of a topic or text prior to the session.

In preparation for speech contests and oral examinations, the Assistant can train the students to produce convincing and creative discourses that demonstrate their skills in the target language. Of course, input from the teacher will be necessary if the Assistant is not familiar with this form of oral production or with syllabus requirements.

“He brings a different mindset; he makes you think like a French man...he gives you a different perspective of life...”
(Year 12 student)

* Teachers are advised to check their school policy regarding protocols around the Assistant working with students on a one-to-one basis.
4. Beyond the Classroom

There are many ways the Assistant can extend the language program and the students’ experience beyond the classroom.

**CREATING RESOURCE MATERIALS**

Schools which choose to invest a proportion of the Assistant’s time in the development of high quality resources will benefit beyond the period of the Assistant’s employment.

The following is a list of suggested resources that could be developed by an Assistant in collaboration with the teacher:

- A website/wiki/blog/podcast about themselves, their family and background, interests
- A website/wiki/blog/podcast/slide presentation about their impressions of Australia/ your school/ your town and some specific comparisons with practice in their own country
- Activities for specific use on an interactive whiteboard
- Audio-recordings of listening comprehension items, texts, messages (using Web 2.0 or similar tools)
- Quizzes based on units of work
- Texts for listening and/or reading comprehension

Additionally, the Assistant may be assigned to identify resources for specific topic areas from magazines, televised documents, online sources and other existing resources within the school. *Appendix 8, Teaching resources*, provides a template for recording the identified materials and their possible use for specific purposes.
EXTRA-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

As mentioned previously, there are benefits in involving the Assistant in school life in general. Teachers may consider inviting the Assistant to participate in:

- school excursions
- language camps
- school concerts and assemblies
- language Days
- languages newsletter
- sister school network
- special cultural events

What sorts of language-based activities are you involved in outside the classroom?
(AFMLTA, 2005)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE TEACHER

When an Assistant has a defined role to play in the school language program, a unique opportunity for the professional development of the language teacher arises. There is much to be gained when teachers give themselves the time to maintain and even upgrade their own proficiency in the target language. Not only do they feel more confident and become more competent but they also demonstrate to students that language, just like a musical instrument, needs to be practised regularly for optimum performance.

Lesson planning and curriculum may be more easily spoken about in English, due to some specialized terminology. However, with only a small extension of vocabulary, this also may become possible in the target language.

In the busy staff room, there may be limited opportunity for the teacher and the Assistant to have an extended conversation in the target language. This is the reason why it is important to set aside a dedicated time for explicit interaction.

While it would seem practical to simply design lessons or talk about the language program during these one-on-one sessions with the Assistant, teachers may value extending their own knowledge, skills and understanding of the language and its culture by pointing out areas with which they are not familiar. Here are two examples:
• Ask the Assistant to download the front page of the current issue of a target country newspaper and use it to compare it with the front page of an Australian newspaper for the same week. This should engender some useful historical or sociological information and prompt discussion about the different treatment of the same subject matter.

• Ask the Assistant to use the target language as they describe how to use a piece of software or web-based tool. Learn additional skills while extending your vocabulary. The same can be done using cultural activities.

Individual sessions given by the Assistant to language teachers to maintain their proficiency should be regarded and recorded as episodes of professional development by the school. Teachers may be able to negotiate the recognition of this investment as part of their formal professional development obligations.

_What recent activities have you undertaken to develop your language and cultural knowledge of the language you teach?_

(AFMLTA, 2005)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ASSISTANT

This Guide has suggested that professional respect should be accorded to the Assistant's role and value in the school. In particular, Assistants who have expressed an interest in a teaching career could be included in the professional development activities of the language staff and the wider school.

In some contexts, it is possible for Assistants to meet other Assistants, to discuss their experiences and teaching strategies. Assistants across different schools could also collaborate to plan cultural and social events to strengthen ties between the schools and with the local community. Teachers may be able to facilitate these links across schools.

Part of the Assistant's professional growth could take the form of a blog in which reflections about their experience are recorded.
MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Research in both Australian and overseas institutions indicates that schools employ some common strategies in maintaining a strong relationship between teacher and Assistant, both for their own enrichment and to maximise language learning outcomes for the students. Learners have a better chance to succeed when the teacher and Assistant work well together. The identified strategies are:

- careful recruiting practice
- clear, respectful communication of roles and expectations
- openness to intercultural dialogue
- collaboration, flexibility, compromise and cooperation.

Where possible, ongoing evaluation should be conducted by the teacher in charge to ensure that the native speaker assistant program is going as planned. A sample evaluation document is available in Appendix 10, Review proforma.

What messages do your students take away from their experience of language learning about the relationship between language, culture and learning?  
(AFMLTA, 2005)

FURTHER READING


While some schools already have a network to draw from in their community to identify suitable native speaker assistants, others may like to refer to some of the following web addresses as a starting point for their search. Please note that this list may be updated from time to time on the AIS NSW website.

- Alliance Française Sydney (French): www.afsydney.com.au
- Bridge (Australia-Asia School Partnerships - Chinese, Indonesian, Korean): www.bridge.edu.au
- Goethe-Institut Australia (German): www.goethe.de/ins/au/lp/enindex.htm
- Co.As.It (Sydney Italian Language and Community Services): www.coasit.org.au
- JICE (Japan International Cooperation Center): http://jice.org/e
- Sister Cities International: www.sister-cities.org
- Consulates/embassies for the relevant country/countries (various web addresses)
- Target language community organisations such as clubs (various web addresses)

Links to other resources:

The United Kingdom offers many useful sources of information with regards to language assistants:

- www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants
- www.britishcouncil.org/languageAssistants-making-the-best-use-of-your-Assistant.htm
- www.primarylanguages.org.uk/professional_development/training_materials__resources/cilt_resources.aspx
APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR RECRUITMENT

It is recommended that only a few of the following criteria be included in the text of announcements for a native speaker assistant.

Criteria:
• Ability to work in a team, in cooperation and collaboration with teachers
• Ability to be a positive and motivating role model of language and culture
• Knowledge and interest in student development
• Personal manner which encourages participation, patience and empathy with beginner language learners
• Willing to work within the professional expectations of the school
• Ability to model critical intercultural thinking and observation in relation to both language and cultures
• No formal qualifications required, but experience in teaching or working with young people will be an advantage.

Specific Responsibilities
• Prepare, organise and set up language activities
• Work with individuals or groups of students under the direction of the teacher
• Attend staff professional development courses where applicable
• Assist teachers with classroom routines and resourcing
• Carry out any other duties at the request of the Head of Language Faculty or individual language teacher.

Expectations
• Appropriate qualifications and experience in assisting classroom teachers.
• Enthusiasm, energy, flexibility and collaboration
• Highly developed interpersonal skills
• Initiative and creativity
• Competence and confidence in the use of ICT.
This form is to be completed by the supervising teacher for discussion with the native speaker assistant. The examples provided can be adapted, removed or kept in full depending on the requirements of the school’s language program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school’s goals for every student are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school’s goals for language learning are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My main goal in including you, the Assistant, is to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Example)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an authentic representative of the target language, you will support me by giving my students more opportunities for learning about the language and culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| My main focus is for each student to: |
| *(Examples)* |
| - Get to know you |
| - Make authentic use of the target language |
| - Gain a deeper understanding of the target language-speaking country/countries |
| - Understand and develop their relationship with the target country/countries |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This year my classes are going to study the following topics:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After a short period of observation and training, I would like you to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Examples)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use the target language when speaking to the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use the target language with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Team teach with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work with small groups of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work with individual students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identify suitable resources to support topics of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assist me in creating resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Previous work experience: |

| Hobbies and interests: |

| Ways I can contribute to the language program (e.g. cooking demonstration in the target language): |

| Any other relevant information: |
The following three checklists may be adapted to suit the school's individual procedures.

### School Administration Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Done</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police check</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with children declaration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily procedure – signing in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID Card and name tag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopy PIN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School diary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm with bursar that Assistant is on payroll</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School library card</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer password and school email address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Orientation and Induction Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Done</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance by Assistant at new staff induction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to administration staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies of school policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided tour of the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to staff (library, IT etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to school at assembly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Department Information</td>
<td>Done</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s chronicle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction in school newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to language staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-hours contact phone numbers of language staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workspace in language staffroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and printer that Assistant can access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery, resources and equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates of staff meetings and professional development courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant’s timetable and period allocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class lists and roll for withdrawal sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant languages department policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workspace for withdrawal sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date &amp; time:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson length:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant participation:</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and intercultural concepts to introduce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary / script to introduce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the lesson (review of prior learning, building the field)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1 (including team teaching, group work, ICT integration etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework and conclusion of the lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources to prepare/collect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This sample feedback grid is for the use of the Assistant during oral interaction in withdrawal sessions. The criteria needs to be altered according to the task being performed and the Year and language level of the student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of student:</th>
<th>Class:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student:</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood all or most of the questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Responded to questions fully and confidently</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Used correct pronunciation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Displayed natural flow of language</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Used a variety of structures and vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 8: TEACHING RESOURCES

The following template can be used by the Assistant to record the resources that he/she can contribute to the topic. These may include artefacts, skills and websites. Note that the third column may require some input from the teacher in the initial stages if the Assistant is not familiar with language learning activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>REALIA / RESOURCE (INCLUDING WEBSITES)</th>
<th>HOW TO USE IT (POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These activities represent examples of well known classroom strategies that can be embedded into a Unit of Work. They are catalysts for focused discussion and enjoyable and purposeful interaction between students and Assistant.

Suggested activities for use in classrooms/withdrawal groups with an Assistant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>20 Questions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Assistant reads out a short paragraph about an historical or modern identity. Students have to ask questions which have a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Only 20 questions allowed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Tourist role-play</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Assistant tells the students that he wants to see the local town sights on the weekend. Students need to advise locations, how he can get there, what he will see there. Students need to visualise their town through the visitor’s perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Visitor role-play</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Assistant is to visit an Australian family for a weekend. Students need to identify and explain what customs and behaviour the Assistant will find different in an Australian family, compared to his/her family home. Students need to draw on knowledge of homes in the Assistant’s country to understand the Assistant’s perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Magazine journalism</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Assistant uses magazines in the target language as catalyst for exploration of magazine journalism. Students explore titles, choice of topics, pictures and captions. Students identify the target audience and analyse the style of writing and choice of vocabulary.  

*Option 1:* Students cut up old magazines, cut up headings and texts, and assemble an original magazine of their own. 

*Option 2:* The Assistant guides students, using digital tools, to create a magazine in the target language about social life in their town or school. 

*Option 3:* With scaffolding, students create articles of interest to target language audience about Australian lifestyle. This requires student research with Assistant input about what is unique and different about Australia. Audience may be sister school peers. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vocabulary building</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Students choose a mixture of consonants and vowels from a pile of letter tiles. Two teams compete to find the maximum number of words in the target language in an allocated time.  

Instant poetry: from an assortment of common words, students collaborate to construct the most bizarre short poem or story. |
**Song as stimulus**

Students learn a contemporary song through a variety of activities such as sequencing, cloze, movement.

**Intercultural exchange planning**

The Assistant helps students plan a real or imagined exchange trip to the target language country. Assistant facilitates intercultural enquiry as to differences between students’ Australian lifestyle and teenage lifestyle in the target country. Assistant advises age-appropriate activities that local students would be doing.

**Intercultural role-play**

Teacher and Assistant role-play a short social situation in which there is a divide between Australian behaviour and expectation and that of the target country. (e.g. issues of punctuality)

**Progressive story creation**

The Assistant supplies a dramatic scenario and makes up an interesting first sentence. Scaffolding may be needed for sentence patterns to be used. The first student constructs the next line of the story. Each student in turn repeats all the sentences that have been said, adding another sentence.

**Draw the idea**

The Assistant whispers a word or sentence to a student. The student has to draw a picture on the board to represent the word / sentence. Students at the table have to say the sentence aloud in the target language.

**For and against an issue**

Assistant offers a provocative statement on a topic of interest: e.g. A driver’s license should not be permitted to high school drop-outs. In two teams, on opposite sides of room, students collaboratively generate simple arguments for their side of the debate. Taking turns, students offer their arguments, trying to persuade members of other team to join their side. Less serious topics can also be used for discussion. (e.g. ‘Spaghetti is better than rice’)

**Extended problem-solving**

- Hot air balloon. A number of students are in a hot air balloon. The balloon is too heavy, and dropping. One person needs to be thrown out of the balloon. Each person is either famous or has an allocated job (e.g. doctor, dentist, farmer etc) and they have to persuade the others that they are important and should not be thrown out of the balloon.
- Survival scenarios. You have crash landed in the desert, 100 KM from the nearest town. Before the plane caught fire, you were able to salvage 15 items. You have to choose the five most important to carry and explain your choices: torch, knife, map, raincoat, compass, first aid kit, parachute, 1 bottle water; book, sunglasses, coat, mirror, hat, matches, tinned food and shovel.
- Going to Mars. Students are allocated a job (e.g. lawyer, politician, farmer…). Each student wants a seat on the first shuttle to Mars to establish a new society there. There are only (x) seats available. Students must justify why they should go, what they can do to establish the colony. A voting system establishes the top priorities.

**Other suggestions**

Bingo, adapted for many purposes (colours, weather, classroom items, vehicles); card games; board games; memory games; traditional games from target country; noughts and crosses, adapted for many purposes (e.g. students have to create a sentence using the pictures which are on each of the nine squares), spelling bee competition.
This document is for completion by the supervising teacher. It may be used for discussion during regular reviews of the program. It can also be referred to if the Assistant requires a formal report or work reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Assistant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of supervising teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up on previous matters:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Matters for Discussion

(removes any item not relevant to your context from the list below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges &amp; Difficulties</th>
<th>Support Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress and appearance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration within the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support offered to the Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support given by the Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherence to agreed learning program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adherence to administrative procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in lesson planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creation of /search for relevant resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timetable variations to be confirmed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>General business / other matters for consideration</td>
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